

# HOWDEN AFRICA

## AN ENGINEERING EDGE



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*Howden Africa, part of Howden Global, is showing impressive growth in meeting the needs of the burgeoning resources industry in Africa*





Geoffrey Chingwaru

In 2008, when many companies were downsizing or holding onto their staff by the skin of their teeth, Howden Africa kept its people in employment. Significant also is that the company, which is listed in the engineering sector of the Johannesburg Securities Exchange, grew its turnover from a base of R400 million in 2005 to almost R1 billion today.

The company's customer-focused approach is worth emulating. Admittedly it helps having a track record in Africa of more than 60 years. "As early as 1925, Howden companies were supplying main surface fans to South African, Zimbabwean and Zambian mines," says Geoffrey Chingwaru, business development and corporate affairs director, happy to illustrate an example of the enduring nature of the company.

In early 2012, the Howden Global holding company Charter International was acquired by Colfax Corporation of the United States, effectively bringing Howden Africa within the ambit of the American company. Chingwaru anticipates a synergistic relationship between Howden and its new owners. "Customer service runs through the veins of Colfax, and is the cornerstone of our success, so bringing the two together will further improve our focus on supplying our mining customers with turnkey solutions for the lifetime of specific projects."

Continuous improvement is at the heart of the thinking of Howden Africa. It is certified in accordance with the requirements of the ISO 9001 Quality Management System and the company has integrated the continual improvement components of the system into its business strategy. The company is also ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001 certified.

In an age where employees typically change jobs many times during their lifetime, staff employed at Howden Africa recognise that the company's far-sightedness in developing products and servicing its markets makes it eminently desirable to build a long-term career there. "We have people with up to 40 years' service," says Chingwaru. "People resign to join other companies but come back soon thereafter. Howden is one of the best companies to work for—it is a university in itself."

This observation is not held lightly by this MBA graduate. "There are growth-orientated changes occurring," says Chingwaru. This is backed up by Howden Global's Howden Academy, developed and presented in partnership with the Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland. The Howden Academy provides job-specific application engineering training to graduate engineers, fast-tracking their transition into effective Howden employees; and Howden Africa employees are regular participants.

"Our business goes beyond profits,"

**R1  
BILLION**  
.....  
Howden Africa's  
approximate turnover

observes Chingwaru. “We endeavour to support our customers in achieving their goals by aligning our service and product offerings with their requirements. Realising the value-add to customers of better understanding the processes behind the technology provided to them, Howden Africa offers engineers from among our customers the opportunity to attend workshops on the technologies employed.”

Serving other major industries such as power generation, petrochemicals, agriculture, construction, refrigeration, water treatment, waste disposal, construction and general industry, in addition to mining, is not without its challenges. “People are at the core of our business success. A big

hurdle is acquiring and retaining top-quality engineering talent to design and support Howden equipment and systems,” notes Chingwaru.

“Recognising the ageing profile of some of our best engineers, we have introduced structured programmes to develop and retain our engineering edge. Recruitment initiatives include the provision of bursaries to the children of staff who wish to study engineering and finance at tertiary institutions. Site visits to the Howden plant arranged for undergraduate mining engineering students also expose possible new recruits to the opportunities on offer.”

The company actively recruits candidates for its annual apprenticeship

**“AS EARLY AS 1925, HOWDEN COMPANIES WERE SUPPLYING MAIN SURFACE FANS TO SOUTH AFRICAN, ZIMBABWEAN AND ZAMBIAN MINES”**

programme in trades such as boiler making, fitting and turning, and welding. “These skills are core to the Howden business,” explains Chingwaru.

The increased enforcement of environmental legislation within the mining and the industrial sectors is another opportunity for extending Howden engineering know-how beyond its traditional

customer base. “Several Howden products are directly associated with the control of dust and the removal of acids from flue gases,” confirms Chingwaru. “Our bag filter and scrubber technologies control dust at industrial plant and are also employed to keep dust emissions from power station flue gases within regulated requirements.”

The company even plays a part in reducing one of the gases which causes acid rain. “Howden supplies dry scrubbers which control sulphur dioxide emissions from industrial plant flue stacks,” explains Chingwaru.

Howden also offers environmentally-friendly solutions in other areas. “Our chillers and other cooling plant used on mines use environmentally-friendly ammonia as a refrigerant. Fans supplied to the mining industry can be optimised for energy efficiency, reducing the carbon footprint of each fan.”

The types of technologies offered by Howden to the mining sector are also changing. South African mines are getting deeper, and conventional air cooling methods using surface chillers and blowers are becoming inadequate and energy-inefficient, making it necessary to use hard ice plants to cool underground air. At 1,500



Compressor plant for a Howden thermal ice storage system



Underground booster fan

**“OUR ENGINEERED SOLUTIONS ARE DEVELOPED FOR GLOBAL APPLICATIONS AND OUR CUSTOMERS ARE GLOBAL MINING HOUSES WITHIN THE RESOURCES SECTOR”**

metres underground, rock surfaces reach 57 Celsius, and hard ice plants provide an economical method of cooling.

Prestigious clients include Zimplats, to whom Howden has supplied mine surface fans and blowers. “We have also tendered for the supply of special material scrubbers and sulphur burner and filtration equipment,” says Chingwaru.

Attuned to ever changing market conditions, Howden Africa is constantly seeking opportunities to extend Howden OEM support to existing and new mining customers expanding into Africa. “Being part of a global company, our engineered solutions are developed for global applications and our customers are global mining houses within the resources sector.”

African companies have unique preferential procurement policies, but Howden Africa has reaped the rewards of the strong relationships built over time by developing an in-depth understanding of customer requirements. “We look at upskilling locals to service the equipment that we supply,” explains Chingwaru. “So we are active in the aftermarket not only in terms of supplying spares, but also in providing local employment opportunities.”

The company supplies turnkey installations in partnership with local fabricators and installation contractors to transfer skills and know-how, creating jobs and local support to customers. “We identify suitable agents and train them in Howden

technologies to effectively and continuously look after our customers,” says Chingwaru.

Four market-focused business units, namely Howden Power, Howden Projects, Howden Fan Equipment and Donkin Fans, meet the diverse needs of a range of industries. What sets Howden Africa apart from its competitors is that many of the technologies used in these industries, including mine ventilation and cooling, were first conceptualised by Howden itself. **BE**

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